1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

bath or wash is necessary to remove the impurity caused by the act. Non-observance of these rules will have a polluting effect; and according to the nature and degree of pollution purificatory rites will have to be undertaken.

Belief in ghosts and spirits is universal. They are feared and propitiated. Strange mystical power pervading certain objects is recognized, and fetishes and amulets are eagerly sought. Witchcraft is often suspected, and three or four people in the community are believed to possess magical powers.

Clearly, Hinduism as it is practised in the village is not the Hinduism of the classical philosophical systems of India, for it possesses neither the metaphysical heights nor the abstract content of the latter. It is a religion of fasts, feasts and festivals, in which prescribed rituals cover all the major crises of life. Worship and propitiation of gods and spirits follow the annual round of festivals and the ritual of the human life-cycle. Disease and difficulty may also necessitate invoking assistance from these sources.

In early childhood religious instruction through legendary tales and anecdotes exercises its influence on the developing mind of the child in whose thoughts and world of fancy these ideas linger on. Youth brings in its wake a more worldly and materialistic outlook towards life and its pleasures. Thoughts are turned to religion when the evening of life approaches, partly to postpone the final moment of departure as long as it could be, and partly to ensure the future lying beyond the point of death. Analysis of life-histories reveals that spiritualism cannot be said to be the keynote in the life of the community; far from it the religion appears to be a practical one. It strengthens and fortifies the individual and the group in situations where technical competence and practical intelligence are of no avail, and at the same time acts as a bond of cohesion for maintaining the structural unity of the society.

2. BELIEF: GODS AND DEITIES

The Muslims believe in one God, and follow the way of life laid down for them by their Prophet. They all belong to the Sunni division, and as such differ from the Shias and other splinter divisions of Islam in respect of the interpretation of their holy book as well as in several details of belief, ritual and ceremonial. Almost all the Muslims of Shamirpet have been converted to Islam from

Hinduism in the course of the last four or five generations.

RITUAL STRUCTURE

795 Hinduism in the course of the last four or five generations. They
776 do not believe in any of the gods of the Hindu Trinity, nor in any of the later incarnations; but they share with the Hindus a living faith in the existence of malevolent ghosts, spirits and witches.
[621] They participate with the rest of the community in village ceremonies and sacrifices. To ward off cholera, plague and smallpox, they too think that it is necessary to propitiate the local deities and goddesses.

779 Village Hinduism is not easy to describe. It is an extremely
184 elastic religion, and within its all-India framework admits of a
614] considerable degree of regional and local variation. In his *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*, M. N. Srinivas has introduced the useful concept of 'spread', and split up village Hinduism into 'All India Hinduism', 'Peninsular Hinduism', 'Regional Hinduism', and 'Local Hinduism'.

776 The people of Shamirpet worship all the major gods of the
171 Hindu pantheon, but many of their cults distinctly belong to the complex of ritual that can be regarded as peculiar to peninsular India. Some of these observances present variations which are confined only to this particular village.

The Hindu concept of a Trinity, comprising three manifestations of divinity—Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the sustainer; and Shiva, the destroyer—has an all-India spread, and in common with the Hindus of the other parts of India the residents of Shamirpet principally worship either Shiva, or Vishnu and his
771 numerous incarnations—particularly Rama and Krishna. The
171 concepts of soul (*atma*), of the reckoning of an individual's actions and their consequences on his present and future life (the concept of *karma*), of laying emphasis on the right ordering of life and on doing what is just and moral (concept of *dharma*), of heaven and hell, and finally of the transmigration of the soul and its re-birth also have such an all-India spread; although there are significant regional and local variations in their details. Finally, the nature of rituals connected with the human life-cycle has been very considerably influenced by the Sanskritic ritual of all-India Hinduism, but it still continues to be characterized by some distinctive regional peculiarities.

778 All over India some rivers are regarded as sacred, and legends and cults grow around them. The Godavari is among the rivers whose sanctity and importance have been enhanced by prominent

½ [The Muslims _ Analyst]

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

mention in Hindu scriptures. Being the most important river of the Deccan region its significance is very great to the Hindus of this area.

Along with the great gods of all-India Hinduism the people also continue to observe cults associated with regional and local deities and goddesses. The nature and characteristics of these goddesses differ widely in the different culture-areas of the land. Some of the goddesses listed below are commonly found in the Telugu-speaking areas, particularly in the Telangana districts of Hyderabad. Their main characteristics according to the residents of Shamirpet have also been mentioned.

They are:

1. Pochamma—goddess of smallpox.
2. Mutyalamma—goddess of chickenpox.
3. Balamma—goddess of fertility whose wrath causes sterility in women.
4. Mahakalamma—goddess of cholera.
5. Durgamma—goddess presiding over the destinies and welfare of the village.
6. Maisamma—goddess protecting the village boundaries.

Besides the above, certain other goddesses are also worshipped. Important among them are Ellamma (for the cure of boils), Pinamma (when naming a child after one of his deceased grandparents), and minor goddesses of the fields who protect the crops. To these must be added several other named and unnamed deities and goddesses whose worship is confined only to the village of Shamirpet.

All the characteristics of Hinduism having an all-India spread, described above, are in evidence in the religion of the people of Shamirpet. There is a small Shiva temple near the house of the Brahmin; another with several images on a hillock by the side of the Deshmukh's house. There are two platforms in the village on which the monkey god Hanuman[1] is lodged. In many clean caste houses there are images or pictures of some of these gods. Those

[1] Hanuman, the 'Son of the Winds', was one of the monkey helpers of Rama in his search for Sita when she was abducted by the demon Ravana (according to the epic poem *Ramayana*). Modern tradition seeks to interpret the Monkeys and Bears of this story as the aboriginal inhabitants of the Deccan at the turn of the Christian era.

778 346 782 who have images of deities bathe them every day and make offerings of food. They are often described as 'family' or household gods. The pictures are worshipped on the occasions of festivals. In the neighbouring village of Aliyabad there is a temple of Rama. Besides these, there are several shrines of the village goddesses. Eight of these are important. Two shrines are dedicated to Maisamma—the *Gadi Maisamma* protects the house and dependants of the village headman, and the *Katta Maisamma* lodged near the tank protects the village boundaries and presides over the agricultural prosperity of the community. Pochamma too has two shrines—one near the houses of the Vaddars and another between the living quarters of the Madigas and the Erkalas. The shrine of Dugamma near the village post office is also important. There is one shrine each for Mahakalamma, Mutyalamma, and Pinamma.

788 People eagerly take the opportunities of attending religious fairs, and of going to holy places for a dip in one of the sacred rivers. The major centre of pilgrimage in the Telugu-speaking parts of Hyderabad is Bhadrachalam where there is an old and impressive temple by the side of Godavari. Those who can afford to and have the inclination go to the other places of pilgrimage having country-wide recognition, such as Allahabad (Prayag) and Benares (Kashi).

3. THE RELIGIOUS YEAR

796 Three major types of religious ceremonies and festivals are observed in the community; family ceremonies, village ceremonies, and caste ceremonies. The Muslim section of the village population has its own family festivals and some communal ceremonies. As pointed out earlier, they participate with their Hindu neighbours in the observance of common village ritual.

HINDU FESTIVALS

Feasts and fasts form an important part of Hindu religious life. Festivals are spread evenly over the whole year. Apart from village ceremonies, agricultural ritual, and special worships organized by some castes individually, there are several festivals which may be observed by most Hindu families, irrespective of their caste

25: Whitehead M-3 (no date) 1921 AW1 India TELUGU AW7

The image of the goddess is taken from the canopy by the washerman, and a Mādigā takes the head of the buffalo with its foreleg in the mouth, the forehead and nostrils all smeared over with fat, and the earthen lamp still lighted on the top. They then all go in procession to the boundary of the village, first the men carrying the buffalo's head, next the washerman with the image, and last the small wooden cart. When the procession arrives at the extreme limit of the village lands, they go on, for about a furlong, into the lands of the neighbouring village. There the Asādis first chant the praises of the goddess, then some turmeric is distributed to all the people, and finally the image is divested of all its ornaments and solemnly placed upon the ground and left there. The light on the head of the buffalo is extinguished, and the head itself carried off by the Mādigā, who takes it for a feast to his own house. The object of transporting the goddess to the lands of the next village is to transfer to that village the wrath of the deity, a precaution which does not show much faith in the temper of the goddess, nor much charity towards their neighbours!

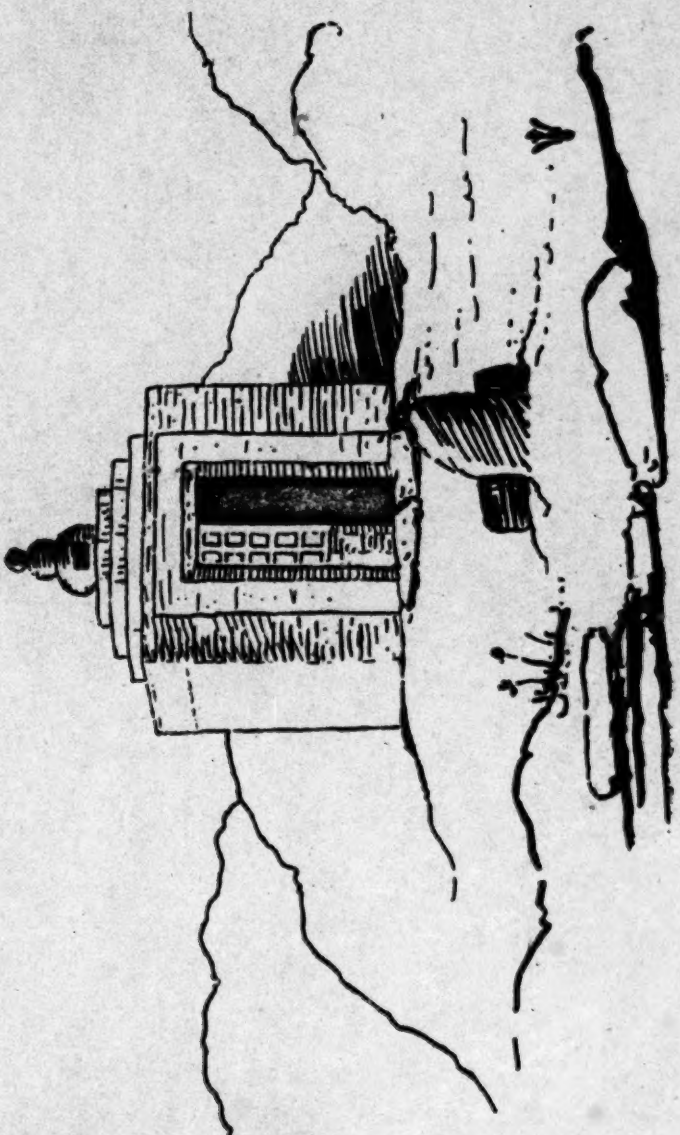
Gudivada, near Masulipatam. A somewhat different form of ceremonial prevails in some of the villages of the Telugu country nearer the coast. The village of Gudivada, about twenty miles from the important town of Masulipatam, may be taken as a good specimen of a well-to-do village in a prosperous district, and the ceremonies prevailing there are a fair sample of the cult of the village deities in these parts.

The name of the village deity at Gudivada is Pallalamma. Her image is the figure of a woman with four arms, and a leopard's head under her right foot, carved in bas-relief on a flat stone about three feet high, standing in an open compound, surrounded by a low stone wall. The pūjārī, who is a Śūdra, gave me a full account of the rites and ceremonies. Weekly offerings are made every Sunday, when the pujarī washes the image with water and soap-nut seeds early in the morning, and smears it with turmeric

25: Whitehead M-3 (no date) 1921 AW1 India TELUGU AW17

PLATE IX

• 778



SHRINE OF POSHAMMA

[facing p. 70]

25: Whitehead M-3 (no date) 1921 AW1 India
TELUGU AW17

to the shrine and presented in a heap before the image, with a lighted lamp on the top of it, made of rice flour kneaded into a paste, and holding about one pint of oil.[1] Some toddy is poured on the ground to the east of the rice by the washerman; incense and camphor are burnt; while the people make namaskāram (salutation with folded hands raised to the forehead) to the image. As many as two hundred sheep and goats are then killed, and fowls are brought by the poorer people. In this festival, the rice soaked in the blood of the victims is not sprinkled on the streets of the village nor over the houses, but each ryot gives a handful of it to one of his field servants (an Outcaste), who takes and sprinkles it over his master's fields. Three handfuls of the crop are cut on the same day to inaugurate the harvest. No buffaloes are sacrificed during this festival.

On the other hand, when an epidemic breaks out, there is a special festival, in which five or six buffaloes are sacrificed as well as about three hundred sheep and goats. The buffaloes are killed last of all. One special buffalo, called *Pedda-Veta*, great sacrifice, is reserved to the end, and killed at about ten p.m. Nothing special is done with the blood of the other buffaloes nor with that of the sheep and goats, but the blood of the Pedda-Veta is allowed to flow on to some of the rice, as soon as the head is severed, and both head and carcass are placed upon the rice heap. The head, as usual, has the right foreleg put in the mouth, with fat smeared over the face and a lighted lamp above it.

At about eleven p.m. the head is carried by aMālā, not by a Mādigā in this village, on his own head three times round the boundaries of the village site, and the rice soaked in blood is sprinkled by the Mālās on the ground, as they go, and on any cattle they happen to meet, accompanied by the same weird and excited procession as elsewhere.

The illustration facing this page represents a shrine of Poshamma, a goddess worshipped by the Mālās. On the top of the shrine stands an earthenware lamp.

[1] See p. 39.